



Root Causes of Racial Disproportionality and Black and Latinx Youth and Young Adults (YYA) Experiencing Homelessness

Qualitative Regional Variation and Impact Data

Youth and Young Adults (YYA) in Massachusetts, particularly young adults of color, are facing homelessness and housing instability attenuated by poor socioeconomic mobility, educational and employment prospects. The Baker-Polito Administration and the Massachusetts State Legislature seek opportunities to support YYA, generally, and attend to racial disproportionality, particularly, during the US Covid-19 recovery.

EOHHS' 2020 report *Furthering the Work of the MA State Plan to End Youth Homelessness: A state-level analysis of Community Needs Assessments* identified significant racial disparities among YYAs experiencing homelessness both at the state-wide and regional levels. Across Massachusetts, the findings signaled key variations: Black YYAs are more than 4x as likely to experience homelessness as compared to the overall population of YYAs and Latinx YYAs are more than 2.5x a likely to experience homelessness as compared to the overall population of YYAs. Nationally, people of color and Black people, in particular, are dramatically more likely to become homeless. Historically, Black people have experienced disproportionately higher rates of homelessness for decades, and only recently have national and local responses to this problem focused on racial equity.

With these findings, EOHHS contracted with NIS to help MA identify community understandings of root causes of homelessness for YYA while identifying paths towards safety and thriving. NIS conducted focus groups and interviews in each of the three regions: Hampden County, Plymouth County, and the MetroWest.

Preliminary findings of root causes for Black and Latinx YYA include:

- Institutional racism and interpersonal discrimination in social service delivery systems
- Systemic "mistrust, distrust and harm" leading to YYA disengagement, not accessing services
- Disproportionate use of force in police interactions
- Social service cliffs, for YYA especially between systems of care
- Lack of preparation increases the risks of unsuccessful independent living
- Economic instability and credit challenges for YYA

Based upon the findings from the focus groups and in-depth interviews, we highlight the following opportunities and recommendations:

1. End Institutional Racism and Interpersonal Discrimination for Black and Latinx YYA in MA social service delivery

This data indicates that YYAs encounter anti-Black racism while attending public school, when applying for homelessness services and when exploring options for housing permanency. Stakeholders must affirm public safety and personal security to combat harmful interactions with local police while experiencing homelessness.

2. Center Equity to Understand the Specific Needs of Black and Latinx YYA across Racial and Ethnic Identities

This data indicates that YYA's proximity to blackness will affect their trajectories within systems. Understanding how and in what ways the experiences of Latinx YYA differ from those of Black YYA might illuminate more clearly the ways that anti-black racism shows up within systems of care.

3. Establish Seamless Services with Hand-offs at the Intersections of Vulnerability for Black and Latinx YYA

YYAs experienced many challenges when moving between systems (e.g. exiting from state systems of care). This often resulted in lapses in service, stress, and in many cases, the beginning of their experience of homelessness. Identifying these intersections between systems and redesigning their connectivity might go far to ensuring that YYAs avoid homelessness when exiting systems of care.

4. Identify, Prioritize, and Activate Mechanisms that Promote Black and Latinx YYA Economic Stability and Mobility

The single-most cited barrier to permanency in housing is economic stability. Services are not currently well-positioned to either see economic well-being (via indicators and metrics) or to meaningfully provide opportunities for YYA to build wealth and attain economic security. Promotion of economic stability and mobility will allow YYA to overcome this key barrier to obtaining and maintaining housing.